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Development of training colleges in Colonial Bengal (1908–1947), British India

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Abstract

Teacher education is a fundamental concept of every educational system. It is closely linked to society and shaped by a nation's ethics, society, culture, and character. In India, teacher education in the modern era was significantly influenced by British colonial rule. Different committees were established to evaluate the system of teacher education and training during the British era. This study attempted to examine the history of teacher training in Colonial Bengal, British India. It aimed to explain when and why teacher training was institutionalized as a system of education during British India, with a particular reference to Bengal province. The study further aimed to identify and clarify the genesis, history, and nature of the teacher training institutions and their role in a historical context. The article provided a detailed case study of key institutions, notably David Hare Training College, Calcutta (1908), Patna Training College (1908), and Teachers' Training College, Dacca (1910), highlighting their origins, curricula, staffing patterns, pedagogical approaches, and institutional challenges. The study revealed how these colleges functioned as a site for disseminating modern pedagogical ideas, emphasizing practical teaching, educational philosophy, and professional ideals of teaching.

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1 Introduction

Teacher training emerged as a significant component of colonial educational policy in Bengal during the early twentieth century. Until 1900, there was no training institute of the collegiate class. The training school at Dow Hill, Kurseong, was established for the Europeans. Two training colleges were planned to establish at Calcutta and Bankipur, and two selected prospective teachers were deputed from Bengal to undergo training in England in order to take the charge of these institutions (Progress of Education in India, 1902-07). For the solution of trained teachers, a co-educational training class was opened at the beginning of 1901 at Kurseong in connection with the Government boarding schools, with the accommodations of sixteen European and Eurasian students (Ray, 1968). Free boarding, lodging, and tuition were provided for all the trainees. Mr. R. Delaney, a trained person was recruited from England with the additional charge of supervision of Victoria Boys' School. The Victoria Boys' School and Dow Hill Girls' School served as a laboratory and practicing school for the Kurseong Training College (Mahanta, 1859). Beginning of 1901, a training class was opened at Kurseong by Mr. R. Delaney, who was a trained person from England and recruited here as a principal. In this college, the 'method' offered was much more than the 'content', and the 'Kindergarten' method was strictly followed. But the college was closed in 1903 due to the sudden resignation of its principal. The function of the college came to an end in 1903, after working for three years, due to the sudden resignation of the principal. It was decided to limit the work of the college in the future to the training of European and Eurasian women teachers in linking with the Dow Hill Girls' School (Allender, 2013).

Some valuable recommendations for teacher training were made in Wood's Despatch of 1854 (Hunter, 1883). The unsatisfactory state of things and repeated failure in experiments in the field of training of teachers, particularly of training in English medium, created an atmosphere of disappointment which was taken seriously by the Government of Bengal and on which the Simla Conference (1901) had to give especially emphasis. Lord Curzon's

declaration in the resolution on Indian Education Policy (1904) emphasized improving training colleges and increasing the supply of trained secondary teachers, ushered in a new era in the training of secondary school teachers (Ayyar, 2017). All these events and elements prepared enough ground to establish filling up the gap of permanent institutions in Bengal. Due to the above-mentioned recommendations, three training colleges were established: Calcutta in 1908, Patna in 1908, and Decca in 1910 (**Table 1**).

It was decided to open a training college for English teachers with effect from 1st July 1908, in Calcutta, primarily for the training of English teacher at Government high school in Bengal, hiring five rooms in the neighborhood of the Hindu and Hare schools, Calcutta. It was further planned that in the year 1908-09, provisions would be made for starting a class with 20 graduates and 18 placement posts would be offered for graduates in private employment. The college owed its genesis to a comprehensive scheme, drawn up by Mr. Alexander Pedler, the then Director of Public Instruction (DPI), Bengal, for better training of teachers of English and Vernacular Schools in the province of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Soon after the establishment of this college, the Calcutta training school (originally established as the Calcutta Normal School more than half a century earlier) was placed under the academic and administrative control of the principal of the college for its improvement. The course of training would lead up to the Bachelor of Teaching (B.T.) degree according to the University regulations (University of Calcutta Regulations, 1908). It was further decided that a start should be made with three officers, namely Messrs Griffth, Thickett and Armitstead, who were specially recruited for the English teachers' training college (Mahanta, 1859). Gradually, its scope increased, and it began to train inspecting officers and teachers of other categories.

The importance of training colleges lay partly in their role in teaching and disseminating a higher conception of the responsibilities and duties of teachers. While, people need ideals, this need was especially strong in British India, where existing conditions were often unsatisfactory. This reality gave particular importance to the establishment of two training colleges for high-school teachers in Bengal during the colonial period (Public Instruction for Bengal, 1909).

2 David Hare training college

The scheme of opening a training college underwent several revisions, and the two colleges that were established hold a loose connection to the original scheme of 1902. Nevertheless, some progress had been made, and the reports on the first year's work were highly satisfactory. As noted in the previous year's report, the David Hare training college opened on 1st July 1908 in temporary yet reasonably adequate premises. These were part of the Albert College (the building was also known as Albert Institute or Albert Hall, presently considered as Coffee House in Kolkata, India), which had recently stopped functioning as an affiliated arts college, sixty years earlier, served as the Presidency College building (Dhar, 2016). The proposal made by Mr. H.R. James proposed that the college should be called "The David Hare Training College", which was warmly accepted by all (Mahanta, 1859). Mr. James had inspected the college on 17th July 1908 to investigate its claim for affiliation in teaching up to B.T. standard of the Calcutta University. But it appeared that there was some confusion between the terms 'training class' and 'training school' in this connection. Finally, on 4th July, the Syndicate of the University of Calcutta recommended the application (Syndicate Report, 1908).

Mr. Griffth opened the new institution on the stipulated date; it was Wednesday, 1st July 1908. Mr. Armitstead joined on the same day. One establishment bearer, Bhawani Prakas Sing, also joined that day. Sri Manmatha Nath Mitra, a clerk in the office of the Inspector of European Schools, joined on 7th July as a clerk and librarian. The class was opened on the same day on

Table 1. List of colleges established following resolution on education policy (1904).

No.	Name of the college	Year of establishment
1	David Hare Training College, Calcutta	1908
2	Patna Teachers' Training College, Patna	1908
3	Decca Teachers' Training College, Dacca	1910

a small scale, with the first-year enrollment limited to 20 students. The staff comprised a principal and two lecturers. Of these 20 students, 16 appeared for the new B.T. examination at Calcutta University, and 14 passed, four of them with distinction. In coordination with the headmasters, the Hindu and Hare Schools were designated as practicing schools, with three rooms in the Hindu School and four in the Hare School specially equipped for this purpose. The headmasters of both schools cooperated willingly, and the support provided by them and other school staff significantly contributed to the smooth functioning of the arrangement (Public Instruction for Bengal, 1909).

2.1 Scheme of studies in David Hare training college

The following topics were included in the curriculum:

Practical teaching: Students watched demonstration lessons for 3 periods each day for 5 days a week. On Saturdays, they attended demonstration lessons by members of the staff.

Lectures: Theory and practice of teaching, methods of scientific subjects, history of educational ideas and methods, and selected educational classics. Each faculty member had to take classes on each subject at least once a week.

Essay writing: Each student had written one essay a week. They received individual instruction with regard to the essay. Three periods were set aside each week for their tuition, and 20 minutes were given to each student. In addition to this, a general lecture on essays was given each week. One period allotted to practice in writing answers to questions bearing on lectures.

Demonstration lessons: Two of the tutors and all the students were present at a demonstration lesson.

Reading: One lesson a week was given. The students were divided into 3 batches and read standard books under the guidance of the staff.

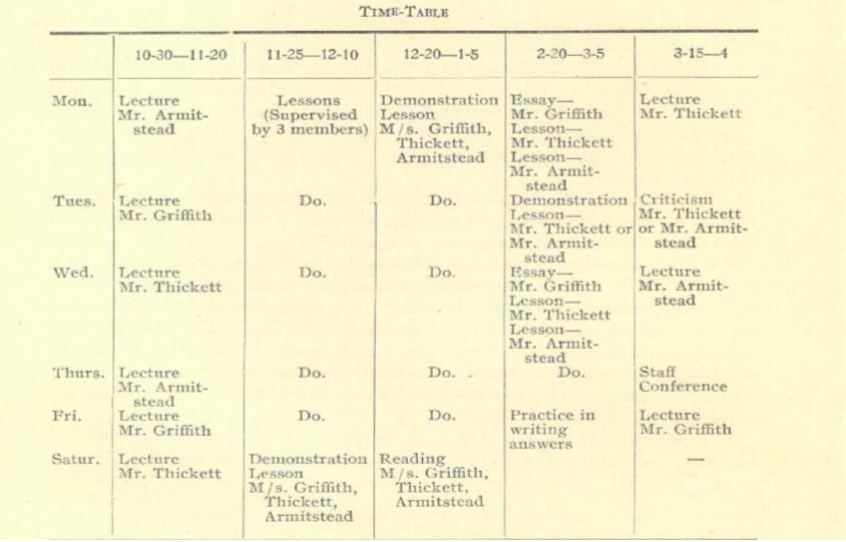
2.2 Distribution of lectures at David Hare training college

David Hare training college, in its early days, required all teachers to teach or take part in deliberations on almost all subjects (**Table 2**). The educational philosophies of Spencer, Froebel, and Locke were in the course content. From the scheme of studies, it appeared that the three members of the staff shared lectures on all the subjects equally. Later, the scheme was altered, and members took subjects according to their special choice (Mahanta, 1859). **Figure 1** showed that regular demonstration of lessons was part of the training. Importance was given to the development of reading and well as writing skills of would-be teachers.

This was only a modest beginning, but the progress made so far was promising. Even within the first year, however, the college faced significant challenges. In July, the staff consisted of three trained and experienced masters of method: Messrs. Griffith, Armitstead, and

Table 2. Distribution of lectures in David Hare Training College.

Name of the teacher	Distribution			
	Theory and practice teaching	*Methods of teaching specific subjects*	*History of educational ideas and methods*	*Selected educational classics*
Mr. Griffth	Topics of the syllabus	Humanistic studies, and general	Western	Education (Herbert Spencer)
Mr. Armitstead	Topics of the syllabus	Training, naturalistic studies	Oriental	Education of man (Froebel)
Mr. Thickett	Topics of the syllabus	School management	Outlines of national system	Some thoughts of concerning education (Locke)



TIME-TABLE

	10-30—11-20	11-25—12-10	12-20—1-5	2-20—3-5	3-15—4
Mon.	Lecture Mr. Armitstead	Lessons (Supervised by 3 members)	Demonstration Lesson M/s. Griffith, Thickett, Armitstead	Essay— Mr. Griffith Lesson— Mr. Thickett Lesson— Mr. Armitstead	Lecture Mr. Thickett
Tues.	Lecture Mr. Griffith	Do.	Do.	Demonstration Lesson— Mr. Thickett or Mr. Armitstead	Criticism Mr. Thickett or Mr. Armitstead
Wed.	Lecture Mr. Thickett	Do.	Do.	Essay— Mr. Griffith Lesson— Mr. Thickett Lesson— Mr. Armitstead	Lecture Mr. Armitstead
Thurs.	Lecture Mr. Armitstead	Do.	Do.	Do.	Staff Conference
Fri.	Lecture Mr. Griffith	Do.	Do.	Practice in writing answers	Lecture Mr. Griffith
Satur.	Lecture Mr. Thickett	Demonstration Lesson M/s. Griffith, Thickett, Armitstead	Reading M/s. Griffith, Thickett, Armitstead		—

Fig. 1. Timetable at David Hare Training College (1908).

Thickett. By October, Mr. Thickett had been transferred to lead a small training college in Patna, and by the end of the year, Mr. Armitstead resigned. Mr. J. MacLean, newly arrived in India to join the Indian Educational Service (IES), temporarily filled Mr. Thickett's position until year-end. Consequently, by the end of the year, only Mr. Griffith remained from the original staff, necessitating temporary arrangements for the following year.

These changes placed a considerable strain on the young institution. Mr. Armitstead's resignation was unavoidable; dissatisfied with the terms of his recruitment, he chose to return to England at the end of his two-year contract, though he agreed to continue his duties through the session's end. Mr. Thickett's transfer to Patna was intended to launch a new experiment there just as the Calcutta initiative was taking off. While it was undoubtedly desirable for Bihar to have its own training college, the establishment of a second, even more weakly supported institution jeopardized the success of the first, already understaffed college. Thus, in its second year, the David Hare Training College faced a significant staffing challenge.

The students came in David Hare training college from all parts of Bengal in the following manner: Presidency Division – 7, Burdwan Division – 1, Patna Division – 4, Chotanagpur Division – 3, Orrisa Division – 2, Bhagalpur Division – 2, and Eastern Bengal and Assam Division – 1. They were all Bengalis except one Bihari from Chotanagpur division. This disproportionate division of students made an agitation and a debate on the subject of regional communalism, which was generated by the Biharis (people who live in the State of Bihar, generally called Biharis). The scope of learning for the students of Bihar was very limited. In the meantime, the partition of Bengal had taken place, and on 1 April 1912, both the Bihar and Orissa divisions were separated from the Bengal Presidency and emerged as the Bihar and Orissa provinces (Bengal Map, 1893).

3 The Patna training college

The college was started for students from Bihar in October 1908 on modest and experimental lines. The Lieutenant-Governor acknowledged that the interests of the teachers in the Bihar districts cannot be adequately met by a single institution in Calcutta (Public Instruction for Bengal, 1909).

J.P. Blair became the first principal of the college on 1st October 1908, and A.A. Kazami was the first Indian principal, assuming charge on 15th August 1947 (Patna Training College, 2025). Although the college was originally established to provide bachelor's degrees in teacher training for graduates preparing for secondary school teaching, the B.T. examinations could not commence until 1915–16. This delay was likely due to ongoing debates in England regarding the appropriate type of teacher training to introduce in India, a controversy that

persisted for many years. Prior to this, the college offered the Licentiate of Training (L.T.) degree.

On 1st October 1917, the Patna Training College became affiliated with Patna University under Section II of the Patna University Act 1917; before this, it had been affiliated with Calcutta University. With this new affiliation, the B.T. program was replaced by the B.Ed. program. In 1926, the L.T. program was discontinued, and a one-year Diploma in Education (Dip. in Ed.) course was introduced to prepare teachers for primary and middle schools. The B.Ed. program was also extended from one academic year to two years.

In 1935, the Patna Training College launched a one-year Master of Education (M.Ed.) program for postgraduate studies in education, becoming the first college in India to offer postgraduate teaching in this field. Following the Patna University Act of 1951, separate postgraduate departments were formally established in 1954–55.

4 Teachers' training college, Dacca

The idea of improving the quality of education is not a recent development. Educators and stakeholders began considering it over a century ago. In this context, an education policy was introduced by William Wood in 1854, known as Wood's Despatch (Ranjan, 2017). The urgent need for establishing teacher training colleges became evident after the 1906 entrance examination results revealed a significant decline. The DPI noted: "*Probably no great improvement in respect of teaching given in high school can be affected until the training colleges are established.*" Acting on this observation, two teachers training colleges were established in undivided Bengal – one in Dacca and the other in Kolkata.

In 1908, David Hare training college was founded in Calcutta, followed by the teachers' training college in Dacca in 1910 (Report of the Dacca University Committee, 1912). As per the Bengal Government's order, Memo no-53, Education, dated 06-01-1909, the Dacca teachers' training college was officially set up and began functioning in the 1909-1910 session with 12 trainees. Mr. Evan E. Bess, an IES officer, was appointed as the first principal. From its inception, the college offered both B.T. and L.T. programs – the B.T. program lasted one year, while the L.T. was six months.

5 Loreto college

Loreto college is an institution of higher education in India today. The college was established in 1912 and managed by the religious order of the Institute of the Blessed Mary, which was a Christian minority college aided by the Government. Loreto college established its teacher training department in 1913 and recently had centenary celebration. Currently, their education department offers a two-year B.Ed. program, affiliated with Calcutta University (Allender, 2016).

6 Union Christian training college

The London Missionary Society (LMS) was established on 22nd September 1795 by Rev. David Bogne, who played an instrumental role in establishing this society. The LMS dedicated itself in spreading education in early colonial Bengal, like other Missionaries' Societies such as the Baptist Missionaries Society (BMS), Church Missionary Society (CMS), Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), and Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) (Sengupta, 2011). In 1933, the National Christian Council carried out a survey as a pilot project for Christian high schools in India. Miss Van Doren emphasized the significance of teacher training in Christian schools (Van Doren, 1922). Van Doren (1922) noted that between 1934 and 1936, there was an exchange of dialogue between Bengal and London, during which the Bengal Committee recognized the importance of secondary teacher training not only for Christian Schools but also for General Schools. Subsequently, the Bengal Committee sought the perspectives of various Christian Councils and Churches and requested their cooperation. As a result, a meeting was held in the Edinburgh House of London in 1937, and the plan for the establishment of a teachers' training college was accepted, and a decision was taken to execute it in practical shape. Representatives of the National Christian Council (N.C.C.) then

visited Berhampore to select a suitable location. Dr. Otto Henry Strusburg was appointed in charge of the L.M.S. Berhampore Section. A German national with a Ph.D. degree from Berlin University, he also possessed extensive knowledge of engineering. Seizing the opportunity to establish a college in Berhampore, he submitted a proposal to the L.M.S., which was subsequently approved by the Bengal Committee to set up a college in Berhampore, located in the present day Murshidabad district of West Bengal, India.

The LMS took all the responsibilities, including the establishment cost of the college building, the students' hostel, and the principal's quarters. The BMS took the responsibility of the principal's salary and others allowances on the condition of getting help from other missionaries and Govt. agencies. Initially, six missions, viz. LMS, MMS, Church of Scotland, Bengal Mission, and the American Baptist Bengal-Orissa Mission, jointly established the college. Later, the Bengal Baptist Union joined these six missions, and on 8th March 1938, the college was renamed as Union Christian Training College. The new academic session commenced in July 1938. It was derived from the name of the college 'Union' Christian training college, that this college is a product of a group of Christian Missionaries' effort and positive will (Union Christian Training College, 2015).

The primary aim of establishing the college was to train teachers for secondary schools. To meet the urgent demand, emphasis was placed on training graduates rather than postgraduates, and the institution was founded as a higher-grade normal school. The societies and churches recognized the critical need for trained secondary school teachers in Bengal. However, the training was not restricted to students from any particular community or religious group; it was made accessible to all communities to promote the development of qualified teachers for secondary schools, particularly in rural areas (Union Christian Training College, 2015).

On the eve of independence (1947), there were 650 training schools with enrollment of 38,770 students in India (Rao, 2009). The number of secondary training colleges all over the country was only 42, with an enrollment of 3,100 teacher trainees (Devi and Padu, 2024). After independence, the Government of India prioritized the reconstruction of the nation's education system. To strengthen teacher education, the government established numerous committees and commissions. Teacher training institutions in India are primarily categorized into three types, corresponding to the levels of education they serve: elementary, secondary, and tertiary.

7 Discussion

The present study has attempted to trace the historical development of teacher training colleges in colonial Bengal during the period 1908–1947, a phase that marked the transition of teacher education from sporadic experiments to a more organized and institutionalized system (**Table 3**). Drawing upon official reports, archival sources, and contemporary educational writings, the article demonstrated that the emergence of training colleges in Bengal was not an isolated phenomenon but the outcome of sustained policy interventions, administrative concerns, and socio-political compulsions of the colonial state.

The analysis revealed that prior to the twentieth century, teacher training in Bengal was largely inadequate, fragmented, and elitist, catering mainly to Europeans and Eurasians and lacking collegiate-level institutions. Recommendations made in Wood's Despatch (1854), the Hunter Commission (1882), and the Simla Conference (1901), followed by Lord Curzon's Resolution on Education Policy (1904), created the necessary groundwork for systematic reform. These initiatives culminated in the establishment of permanent secondary teacher training institutions such as David Hare training college (Calcutta), Patna training college, and teachers' training college, Dacca. Among these, David Hare training college emerged as a pioneering institution, introducing a modern curriculum that emphasized professional preparation, practical teaching, educational philosophy, and the development of pedagogical skills.

The study further highlighted that the growth of teacher education in colonial Bengal was shaped by multiple agencies, including governmental, university-based, and missionary agencies (Lal, 2016; Ghorai, 2025). Institutions like Loreto college and Union Christian training college,

Table 3. The establishment of teacher training colleges in Colonial Bengal (1908-1947).

Name of the center	Year	Affiliating University in 1947	Present position
David Hare Training College	1908	University of Calcutta.	The college offers B.Ed. and M.Ed. courses. From 2015 the college has been affiliated by the West Bengal University of Teacher Training, Education Planning and Administration. Abolished in 2016.
Patna Training College	1908	The college was primarily affiliated by the University of Calcutta. But from 1st October 1917, the Patna training college was affiliated to the Patna University under section II of the Patna University Act 1917.	Patna training college is a constituent unit of Patna University. In 1935, the Patna training college started one year M.Ed. program for postgraduate teaching in education.
Dacca Training College	1910	Initially the college was affiliated by the University of Calcutta; however, since 1921 the college has been affiliated by the University of Dacca.	Dacca University Act of 1920, Act No. XVIII was passed by the legislative council that received the assent of the Governor General on 23 March and in 1921 when Department of Education was started the college merged in the department.
Diocessan College, Calcutta	?	The institution initially pioneered enlightened education for girls in West Bengal. It was the first and only Christian college for women.	The recognition of the college was revoked in 1935, because one of the students Smt. Beena Das (renowned freedom fighter of West Bengal) shot Stanley Jackson, the then Governor of Bengal.
Loreto College, B.Ed. Department	1913	University of Calcutta	The department offers B.Ed. program.
Union Christian Training College, Berhampore, Murshidabad	1938	From its inception it was affiliated to the University of Calcutta but since 1999 it is affiliated to the University of Kalyani.	This Institution was the joint enterprise of seven missionary societies and churches, established with the primary object of meeting the urgent need for trained teachers in Christian secondary schools in West Bengal, but the facilities for training are extended to students of all communities. The B.Ed. course started in 1938 and B.P.Ed. in 1975.

Berhampore, reflect the significant contribution of missionary organizations in expanding access to teacher training, particularly for women and rural communities, while also transcending religious boundaries. At the same time, the research brings out persistent challenges faced by these institutions, including staff shortages, uneven regional representation, administrative uncertainties, and tensions arising from provincial reorganization and communal considerations.

By the eve of independence, although the number of secondary training colleges remained limited in relation to the vast demand for trained teachers, these institutions had laid a durable foundation for professional teacher education in eastern India. They helped redefine teaching as a specialized profession requiring systematic training, thereby altering earlier perceptions of teaching as a last-resort occupation. The legacy of these colonial-era training colleges

continued to influence post-independence educational reconstruction, curriculum reforms, and the expansion of teacher education at elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

8 Conclusion

The development of training colleges in colonial Bengal represents a crucial chapter in the history of Indian education. Despite being shaped by colonial priorities and elite perspectives, these institutions played a formative role in institutionalizing teacher education and provided the structural and ideological base upon which modern teacher education in India was built after the independence in 1947.

9 Ethical statements

Not applicable.

10 Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to this study.

11 Data availability statement

The data used in this study are publicly available, including published books, peer-reviewed articles, and other sources.

12 Author contributions

Ajoy Ghosh: Conceptualization and writing original draft. The author approved the final version of the manuscript.

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